

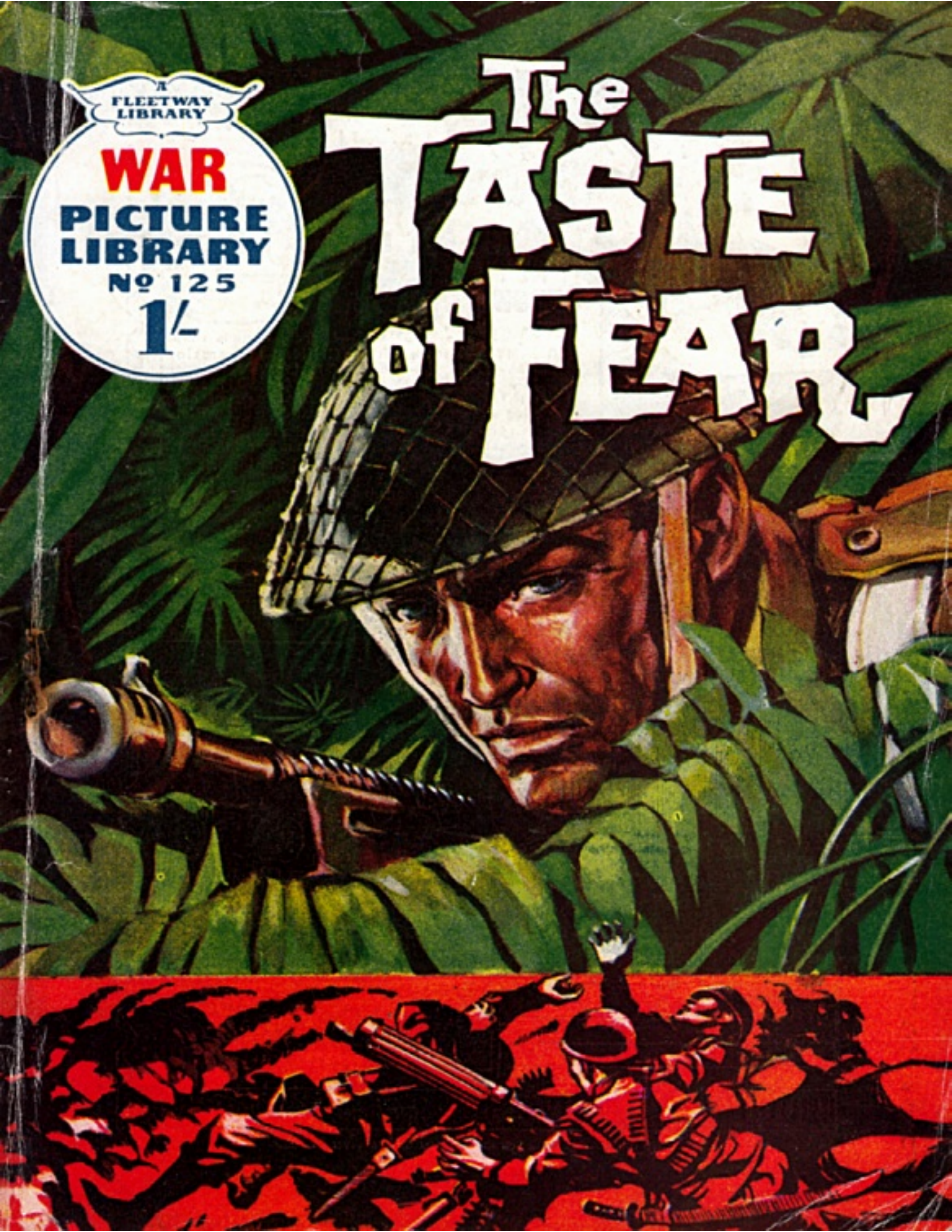
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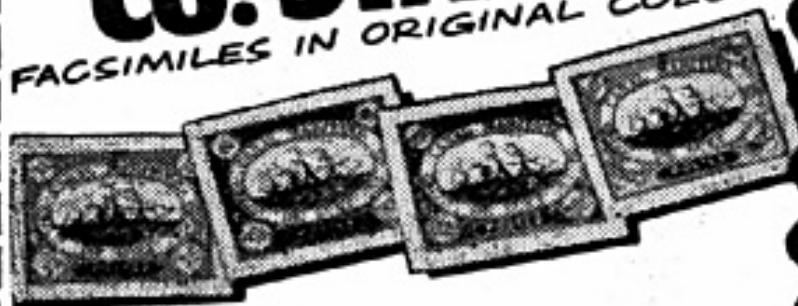
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The TASTE OF FEAR



IN 1942, THE BRITISH ARMY WAS LOCKED IN BATTLE, UNDER THE MOST GRUELLING CONDITIONS IT HAD EVER FACED. IN THE STEAMING, BLOOD-STAINED JUNGLES OF NORTH BURMA. IN DENSE, HUMID EQUATORIAL FORESTS, SO THICK THAT A MAN COULD BE FIFTY YARDS FROM THE ENEMY AND NOT KNOW IT, THEY STRUGGLED, SWEATED, FOUGHT AND DIED. PITTED AGAINST A RUTHLESS AND CUNNING ENEMY THAT MARCHED UNDER THE FLAG OF THE RISING SUN.

Chapter 1. REPLACEMENT COMPANY

FOR CAPTAIN CRAIG MAITLAND, THE RESPITE FROM THE WAR WAS OVER. AS HE LEFT CHITTAGONG BASE HOSPITAL, HE KNEW THAT AHEAD OF HIM LAY ANOTHER TOUR OF DUTY IN THE GREEN TWILIGHT NIGHTMARE OF THE JUNGLE...

THAT'S MAITLAND, ISN'T IT? NEVER THOUGHT HE'D LIVE WHEN THEY BROUGHT HIM IN. YOU'VE DONE A FINE JOB PATCHING HIM UP.

WE MAY HAVE HEALED HIS BODY, BUT WE HAVEN'T HEALED HIS MIND. HE'S HAD A ROUGH TIME, I WOULDN'T LIKE TO SAY WHAT IT'S DONE TO HIM.

FOR EIGHT LONG, WEARY MONTHS, CAPTAIN MAITLAND HAD LED HIS COMPANY AGAINST THE JAPS. THEY HAD LEARNT THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE THE HARD WAY, WELDING THEMSELVES INTO ONE SUPERB FIGHTING MACHINE, THAT HAD WON THE RESPECT OF THE ENTIRE BRIGADE.

MISSION COMPLETED, SIR. WE'VE BROUGHT SOME VISITORS BACK FOR LUNCH.

WELL DONE, MAITLAND... YOU'VE PULLED IT OFF AGAIN.

IN THE GRIM, BLOODY CLASHES OF JUNGLE WARFARE, MAITLAND HAD ALWAYS BEEN JUST ONE JUMP AHEAD OF THE JAPS, UNTIL ONE FATEFUL NIGHT...

I DON'T LIKE IT RALPH... IT'S TOO QUIET!

YOU'RE GETTING JUMPY, SKIPPER! YOU'VE BEEN AT IT TOO LONG!

BUT MAITLAND'S INTUITION HAD NOT FAILED HIM. AS THE PATROL SLID SILENTLY ASHORE, THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT WAS SHATTERED BY THE ROAR OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE. FROM ALL SIDES, VICIOUS YELLOW FLAMES STABBED AT THEM FROM THE DARKNESS.

AAAGH!

BACK TO THE BOATS, MEN!
IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!

THEY'RE ALL AROUND US!

THE FIRST MORTAR BOMB THAT FELL HAD SAVED MAITLAND'S LIFE. THROWN BY THE BLAST TO THE WATER'S EDGE, HE HAD FALLEN BADLY WOUNDED, BUT CONCEALED, AS THE JAPS FINISHED THEIR GHOULISH TASK.



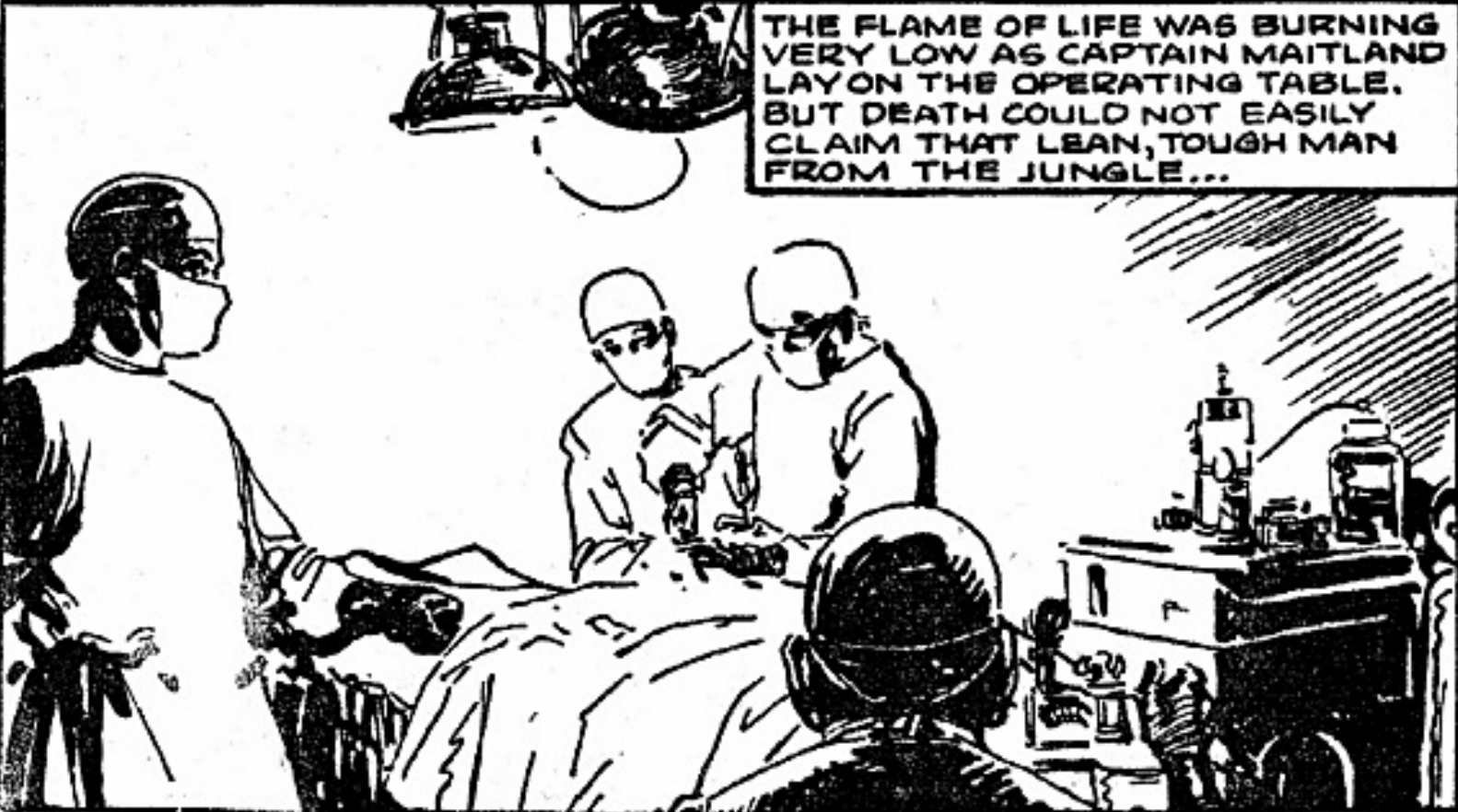
IT WAS TWO DAYS LATER THAT A BRITISH PATROL FOUND WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN 'D' COMPANY.



SIR! OVER HERE!
THERE'S ONE STILL
ALIVE.

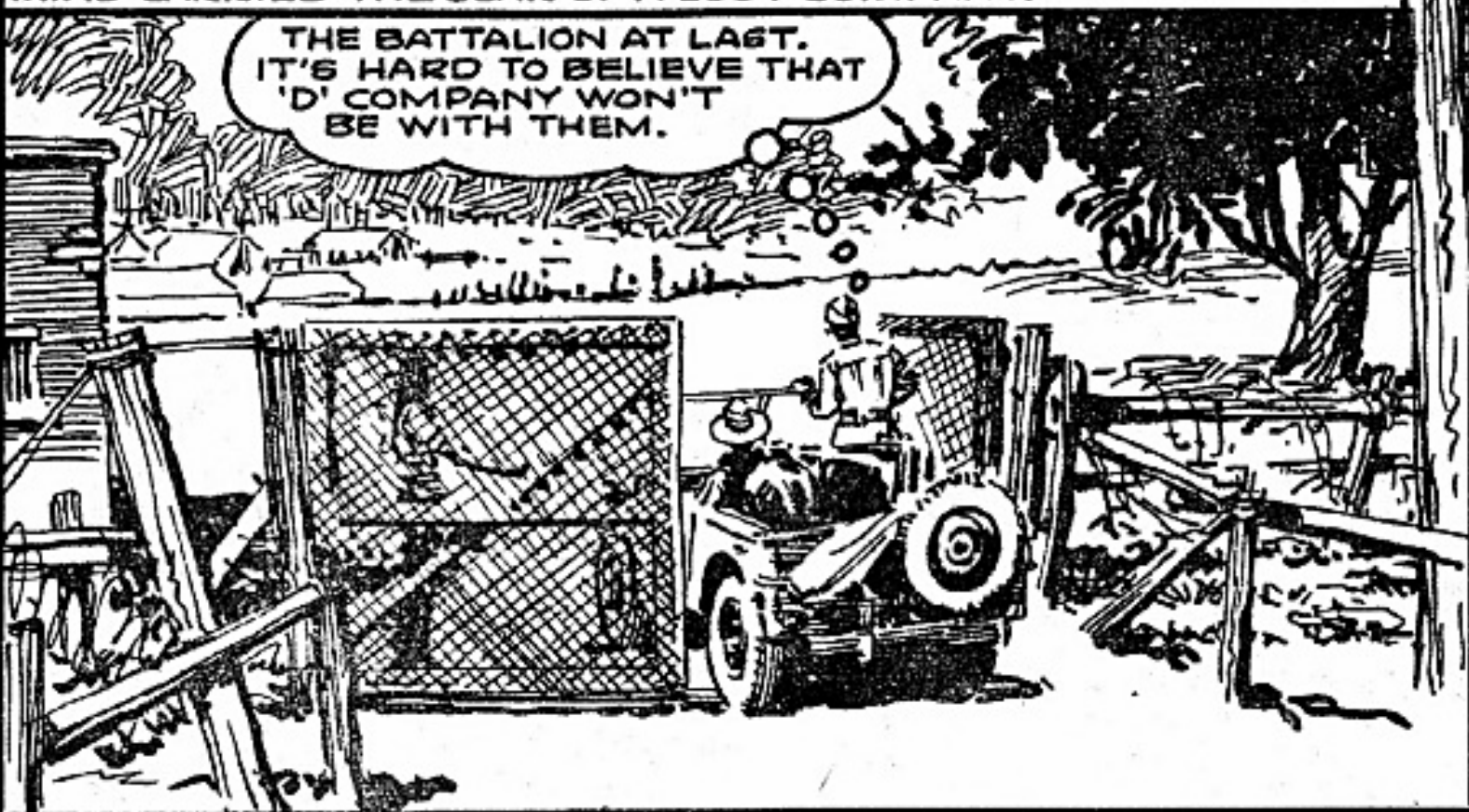
POOR DEVILS!
THEY NEVER STOOD
A CHANCE, MUST
HAVE WALKED
STRAIGHT INTO IT!

THE FLAME OF LIFE WAS BURNING VERY LOW AS CAPTAIN MAITLAND LAY ON THE OPERATING TABLE. BUT DEATH COULD NOT EASILY CLAIM THAT LEAN, TOUGH MAN FROM THE JUNGLE...



TWO MONTHS LATER, CAPTAIN MAITLAND LEFT THE HOSPITAL. AS THE DOCTOR HAD SAID... PHYSICALLY HE WAS FIT, BUT HIS MIND CARRIED THE SCAR OF A LOST COMPANY.

THE BATTALION AT LAST.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT
'D' COMPANY WON'T
BE WITH THEM.



DURING THE LONG WEEKS WHEN MAITLAND HAD LINGERED BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH, HIS BATTALION HAD PULLED OUT FROM THE LINE. NOW BACK AT BASE, THEY WERE REFITTING.

IT'S GOOD TO SEE
YOU BACK, MAITLAND. YOUR
NEW COMPANY ARRIVES THIS
AFTERNOON. THEY'RE STRAIGHT
OUT ON DRAFT FROM THE U.K.
SERGEANT-MAJOR FLETCHER
WILL HELP YOU SORT THEM
OUT. THEY'LL BE PRETTY
GREEN, SO YOU'VE GOT A
TOUGH JOB AHEAD OF YOU...



THE C.O. KNEW ONLY TOO WELL HOW MAITLAND FELT ABOUT THE LOSS OF HIS COMPANY. HE HOPED THAT THE TOUGH TASK OF BREAKING IN THE RAW RECRUITS WOULD OBLITERATE THE PAIN... BUT THE SIGHT OF THE NEW DRAFT MARCHING INTO CAMP DID NOTHING TO RELIEVE MAITLAND'S DEPRESSION.

SO THIS IS WHAT IT'S COME TO!
HEAVEN HELP US, SERGEANT-MAJOR!
HEAVEN HELP US!

2ND. LIEUTENANT KEN ROGERS WAS KEEN, BUT PRECIOUS LITTLE ELSE. HIS NEW COMMANDER'S WORDS WERE BLUNT AND DISILLUSIONING...

SECOND LIEUTENANT ROGERS AND
NEW DRAFT, SIR! WE...WE'RE ALL
VOLUNTEERS FOR BURMA, SIR, AND
GLAD TO BE HERE.

IF YOU DID BUT KNOW
IT, LIEUTENANT, YOU STAND
AT THE GATEWAY TO HELL!
A FEW WEEKS FROM NOW AND
YOU WON'T BE SO PLEASED!

THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT'S FACE FLUSHED FROM THE CUTTING REBUKE, BUT THE ACID VOICE OF THEIR NEW COMMANDER WENT ON TO ADDRESS THE COMPANY...

I AM CAPTAIN MAITLAND, YOUR COMPANY COMMANDER. FROM THE LOOK OF YOU AT THE MOMENT, THE JAPS HAVE GOT LITTLE TO BE WORRIED ABOUT, **BUT YOU'VE GOT PLENTY.** WE START TRAINING AT DAWN TOMORROW. GET ALL THE REST YOU CAN TODAY. BELIEVE ME, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED IT!

COR!
WE'VE COPPED
A RIGHT ONE
HERE!

AND THEY LEARNT THAT IT DID NOT PAY TO STEP OUT OF LINE WITH THEIR NEW COMMANDER.

SILENCE IN THE RANKS THERE! YOU...
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

ER...ER...
HENDERSON, SIR.

RIGHT, HENDERSON...AND ALL THE REST OF YOU...LET'S GET THIS CLEAR. I'M RUNNING THIS COMPANY...IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE WAY I DO THINGS, YOU'D BETTER CHANGE, AND QUICK, BECAUSE I WON'T!



DESPONDENTLY, 'D' COMPANY SETTLED INTO ITS NEW QUARTERS. FOR ONCE, CHEERFUL YOUNG CHICK HENDERSON WAS DOWNCAST. EVEN HIS CLOSEST PALS, BIG BILL TAYLOR, AND THE ETERNAL PESSIMIST, SMILER JOHNSON, FAILED TO RELIEVE HIS GLOOM.



NO, IT'S THAT CAPTAIN. I RECKON HE DON'T LIKE THE LOOK OF US, AND LOOK AT THE WAY HE BAWLED ME OUT!

TO THE EXPERIENCED EYE OF THE CRUSTY REGULAR, SGT. BULLOCK, MAITLAND WAS A MAN HE WOULD BE GLAD TO HAVE AS A LEADER, WHEN THE ODDS WERE LONG AND THE AMMO LOW...



STOW IT, SMILER! I'VE SERVED MY TIME MOST OTHER PLACES, AND YOU CAN TAKE IT FROM ME, WHEN WE GET UP AGAINST IT, YOU'LL BE GLAD ENOUGH THAT THE CAPTAIN IS LEADING US.

AT DAWN NEXT MORNING, THEY STARTED ON THEIR THREE WEEKS' TRAINING. THREE SHORT WEEKS, IN WHICH THEY WERE TO LEARN TO TAME THE HOSTILE JUNGLE, A WILD TERRITORY WHERE A CARELESS SLIP COULD BRING SUDDEN DEATH.

FROM NOW ON WE'LL BE IN THE JUNGLE, AND REMEMBER THIS, **IT'S A CASE OF THE QUICK OR THE DEAD** IN THERE. WHEN I GIVE AN ORDER I WANT TO SEE YOU MOVE - **AND I MEAN MOVE!** LET'S GO!



SLOWLY, PAINFULLY, THEY LEARNT THE HARSH LAWS THAT GOVERN SURVIVAL IN THOSE DENSE GREEN FORESTS. SLOWLY, THEY BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO THE EXHAUSTING HUMIDITY OF THE TROPICAL CLIMATE, BUT IT WAS A HARD PROCESS... TOO HARD, IN FACT, FOR SOME...

HOW MANY MORE BLOOMIN' MILES? I THINK I'LL SIT THIS ONE OUT.



BUT ALWAYS THERE WAS MAITLAND
TO DRIVE THEM ON...

I'M... I'M SORRY, SIR.
I WAS SO BLOOMING TIRED
I HAD TO STOP. I WAS
GOING TO CATCH UP...
HONEST, SIR!

FALL OUT IN JAP TERRITORY,
JOHNSON, AND NO ONE WILL COME
BACK FOR YOU. YOU'LL BE LEFT
ALONE TO DIE IN THE JUNGLE.
NOW GET ON YOUR FEET
AND MARCH!

NEVER WAS A MISTAKE
MISSED OR FORGIVEN...

CALL YOURSELVES AN ADVANCE
GUARD? YOU'VE COME FOUR HUNDRED
YARDS AND NOT ONE OF YOU LOOKED
UP AT THE TREES. DON'T YOU KNOW
JAPS CLING LIKE LEECHES UP THERE?

UNDER THE HARSH CONDITIONS OF THE TROPICAL CLIMATE, NERVES WERE TAUT AND TEMPERERS FRAYED. ONLY THE STOLID BILL TAYLOR REMAINED UNPERTURBED.

WHO THE BLUE BLAZES DOES HE THINK WE ARE, SUPERMEN? YOU CAN'T DO A DARN THING WITHOUT HE'S ON YOU LIKE A TON OF BRICKS.

YOU'RE RIGHT THERE, BUT IF THERE HAD BEEN NIPS UP IN THE TREES WE'D HAVE BEEN GONNERS.



RANK OR FILE, IT WAS ALL THE SAME TO MAITLAND. HE BULLIED, CHIVVIED, AND DROVE HIS MEN ON TO BREAKING POINT - AND PAST...

GET A GRIP OF THOSE MEN, ROGERS! WHEN I SAY DIG IN, I MEAN **DIG**. I DON'T MEAN SCRATCH AT THE EARTH.

THEY'RE PRETTY TUCKERED OUT, SIR. THEY'VE BEEN HARD AT IT ALL DAY.



I REGRET TO INFORM YOU, LIEUTENANT, THAT THE JAPANESE WILL HAVE LITTLE SYMPATHY FOR YOUR FATIGUE. IF YOU'VE GOT TO HOLD OFF AN ATTACK, IT'S DIG OR DIE!

YES, SIR.

THAT BLOKE'S NOTHING BUT A DURNED SLAVE DRIVER. DON'T HE EVER LET UP?

BUT THERE WAS NO LET-UP. FOR THREE WEEKS THEY MARCHED, SWEATED AND TRAINED...AND ALWAYS THERE WAS MAITLAND, URGING THEM ON.

COME ON! PUT A BIT OF BEEF INTO IT. THAT'S A JAP THERE, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TICKLE HIM!



IT WAS A WEARY COMPANY THAT TRUDGED AND LIMPED ITS WAY BACK TO CAMP. BUT THE RAW EDGE HAD WORN OFF. MEN LIKE BILL TAYLOR AND SMILER JOHNSON, WHO ONLY A FEW SHORT MONTH AGO HAD BEEN CIVILIANS, HAD BEGUN TO LEARN SOLDIERING THE HARD WAY.

BOY, AM I LOOKING FORWARD TO A SHOWER AND A GOOD KIP DOWN!

DON'T KID YOURSELF, BILL... WE'VE ONLY HAD A TASTE OF IT. NEXT TIME IT'LL BE THE REAL THING.



WITH THE WELCOME COOL OF THE EVENING, THE MEN OF 'D' COMPANY ENJOYED THEIR REST FROM THE ARDUOUS TRAINING. BUT FOR 2ND. LIEUTENANT ROGERS, WEARY AS HE WAS, THERE WAS NO BREAK.

CHECK ALL ARMS AND EQUIPMENT NOW, ROGERS, AND THEN HOLD A FOOT INSPECTION. WHEN YOU'VE DONE THAT, REPORT BACK TO ME.

VERY GOOD, SIR.



AS THE MEN OF 'D' COMPANY RELAXED, AN ENDLESS COLUMN OF FIERCE BROWN WARRIORS SNAKED ITS WAY THROUGH FROM THE HILLS OF INDIA. AN INFANTRY DIVISION WAS MOVING EAST.



AT ADVANCED H.Q. EASTERN COMMAND, GENERAL BLUTCHER RALLIED HIS COMMANDERS FOR A FRESH OFFENSIVE.



GENTLEMEN, THE INDIAN DIVISION WILL BE DEPLOYED FOR BATTLE WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS. OUR INTENTION IS TO STRIKE IN THE SOUTH, BUT FIRST WE MUST DIVERT THEIR ATTENTION TO THE NORTH HERE...

THE HARD-HITTING GENERAL WAS NOT THE MAN TO LET GRASS GROW UNDER HIS FEET. WITHIN AN HOUR OF HIS STAFF CONFERENCE HE HAD ARRIVED AT THE BRITISH BASE REINFORCEMENT CENTRE.



Chapter 2. The LONG TREK

WHEN CAPTAIN MAITLAND RECEIVED AN URGENT SUMMONS FROM HIS COMMANDING OFFICER HE REALISED THAT THE GENERAL'S VISIT WAS NOT A ROUTINE INSPECTION.

COMMANDING OFFICER'S COMPLIMENTS, SIR. WOULD YOU REPORT TO HIM AT ONCE?

ALL RIGHT, SERGEANT-MAJOR. STAND BY FOR ACTION WHEN I GET BACK. I'VE GOT A HUNCH THE GENERAL'S VISIT MEANS BUSINESS.



GENERAL BLUTCHER WASTED LITTLE TIME IN COMING TO THE POINT. RAPIDLY HE OUTLINED THE HAZARDOUS TASK THAT WAS TO BE THE RAW 'D' COMPANY'S FIRST MISSION.

CAPTAIN, AT FIRST LIGHT TOMORROW YOU WILL BE FLOWN TO A FORWARD LANDING STRIP, SOUTH OF THE NAGA HILLS. FROM THERE YOU WILL ADVANCE AND CAPTURE KATANGI RIDGE. AND YOU WILL HOLD THAT POSITION FOR TWO DAYS !



THE GENERAL SPOKE CONFIDENTLY, BUT MAITLAND KNEW THE FUTURE LOOKED GRIM AND TOUGH FOR HIS NEW COMPANY.

FROM INTELLIGENCE REPORTS WE KNOW THAT THE AREA IS HELD BY ONLY A SMALL FORCE OF JAPS. YOUR TASK IS TO MAKE THEM BELIEVE THEY HAVE AT LEAST A BATTALION TO CONTEND WITH. THAT RIDGE MUST BE TAKEN...
THERE WILL BE NO RETREAT!



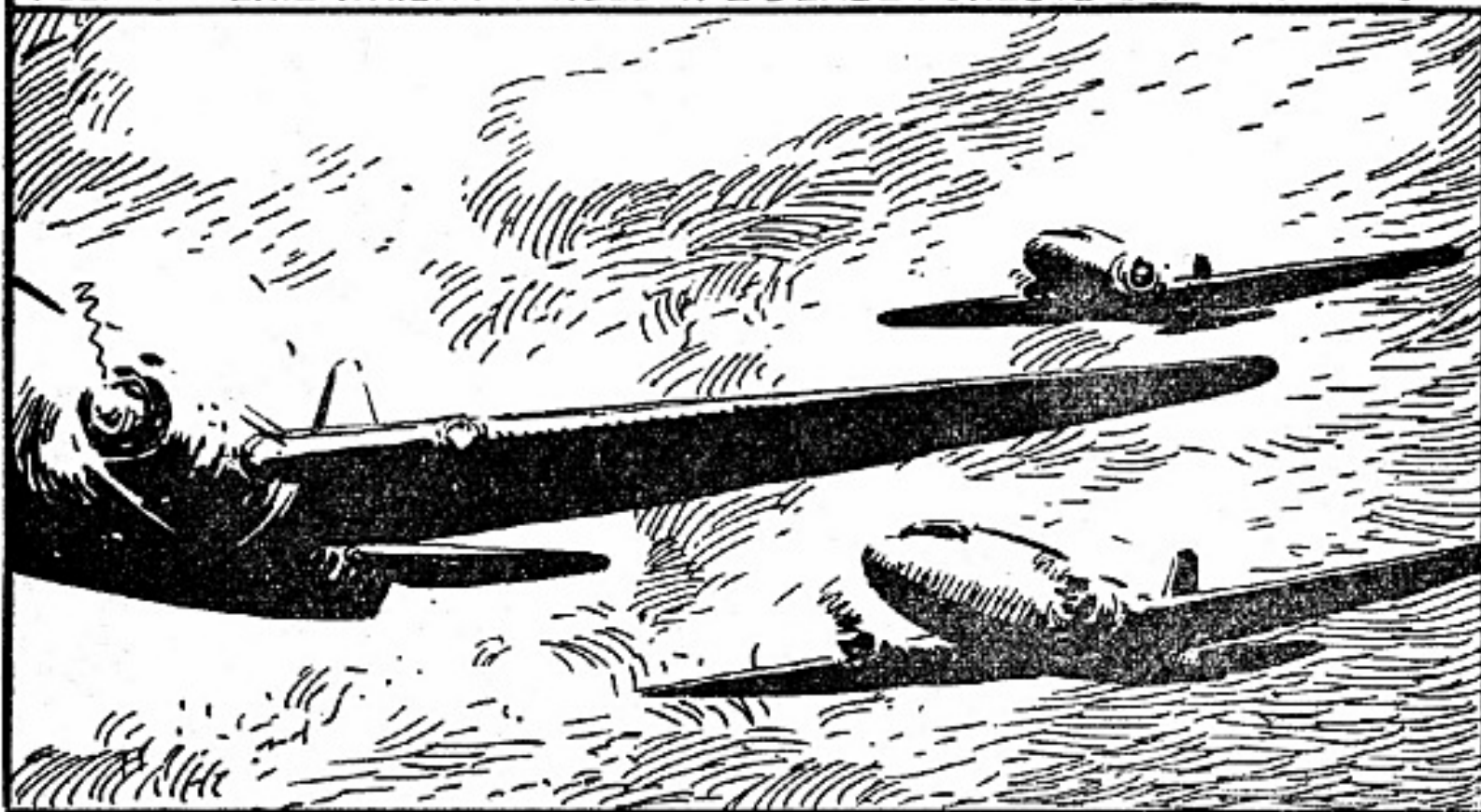
THE JUNGLE IS PRETTY THICK UP THERE, SIR. WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO KEEP THEM GUESSING FOR A WHILE.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, AS THE FIRST RAYS OF THE SUN BROKE THE LONG SHADOWS OF THE SURROUNDING JUNGLE, SIX TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT BEGAN TO FILL UP WITH THEIR HUMAN CARGO.



BY WHAT RIGHT DO I SEND MEN SO GLADLY TO THEIR DEATHS? BUT - IT HAS TO BE THIS WAY! IT'S THEM OR PERHAPS THE LIVES OF A THOUSAND MEN...

TO THE UNTRIED SOLDIERS WHO FLEW IN THOSE AIRCRAFT, THERE SEEMED LITTLE CAUSE FOR FEAR. THEY HAD YET TO MEET THE YELLOW PERIL WHICH PROWLED THE DENSE FORESTS BELOW THEM!



ONE BY ONE, THE PLANES LANDED ON THE NARROW AIR-STRIP THAT HAD BEEN WRESTED FROM THE JUNGLE. THIS WAS NO MAN'S LAND. BEHIND, LAY THE BRITISH LINES... AHEAD, SOMEWHERE IN THE UNKNOWN HOSTILE JUNGLE WERE THE FANATICAL JAPANESE ARMIES...

LOOKS LIKE THE START OF THE BIG PUSH WE'VE HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT.

IF THEY'RE GOING EAST INTO THE HILLS, I WISH 'EM LUCK. BETTER THEM THAN ME!



CAPTAIN MAITLAND LOST LITTLE TIME IN CALLING HIS OFFICERS AND MEN TOGETHER FOR A CONFERENCE...



CURTLY, HE OUTLINED THE ORDER OF MARCH.

OUR OBJECTIVE IS KATANGI RIDGE, BUT TO REACH IT WE HAVE TO FIGHT OUR WAY THROUGH FIFTY MILES OF RUGGED COUNTRY. IT'S GOING TO BE TOUGH, BUT BY KEEPING AWAY FROM THE MAIN TRACKS WE'LL AVOID THE JAP PATROLS.



DESPITE THE FOUR MULES THAT HAD JOINED THEM, EACH MAN WAS WEIGHED DOWN WITH A BACK-BREAKING BURDEN. FROM THE HEAD OF THE LINE CAME THE ORDER THEY WERE TO HEAR TIME AFTER TIME IN THE DAYS THAT LAY AHEAD.



LOAD UP...
PREPARE TO MARCH...
FORWARD.

FROM THE START, THE GOING WAS TOUGH. THE SUN BEAT DOWN FROM A SKY WHITE WITH HEAT, AND THE JUNGLE UNDERGROWTH CUT AT THEIR ARMS AND LEGS. SWEATING AND STUMBLING, THEY TRAMPED FORWARD, EACH STEP TAKING THEM DEEPER INTO THE INTERIOR...



AS THEY SANK TO REST IN THEIR CAMP THAT NIGHT, TIRED MEN THANKFULLY EASED THEIR EQUIPMENT OFF. CAPTAIN MAITLAND HAD CHOSEN THE SITE WELL. THEY STOOD LITTLE CHANCE OF BEING SURPRISED, BUT HE AND HIS SERGEANT-MAJOR CHECKED EVERY DEFENCE POSITION BEFORE THEY SOUGHT REST.

MAKE THE MOST OF A GOOD NIGHT'S REST, SERGEANT-MAJOR. IT MAY BE OUR LAST FOR SOME TIME. HOW DO YOU THINK THIS BUNCH OF ROOKIES ARE SHAPING?

WELL ENOUGH FOR TODAY. IT'S WHEN WE BUMP TROUBLE THAT WE'LL KNOW IF THEY'VE ANY STOMACH FOR A SCRAP, SIR.



BEFORE DAWN, THE COLUMN RE-FORMED AND MOVED OFF. REFRESHED FROM THEIR NIGHT'S REST, THEY MADE GOOD HEADWAY, BUT AS THEY CROSSED THE BROAD TRACK INTO JAP TERRITORY, MAITLAND CAME TO AN ABRUPT HALT.

MISTER ROGERS, TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THIS. A JAP PATROL HAS PASSED THIS WAY, AND NOT LONG AGO! WE'LL GET ACROSS THIS TRACK AT THE DOUBLE, AND GET THE COLUMN INTO THE JUNGLE...

VERY GOOD, SIR.

THE KEEN, TRAINED EYES OF CAPTAIN MAITLAND HAD NOT MISSED THE UNMISTAKABLE IMPRINT OF THE JAPANESE-1650S JUNGLE BOOT.

THE SWEATING MEN DOUBLED ACROSS THE CLEARING. ONLY HALF THE COLUMN HAD REACHED THE COVER OF THE JUNGLE WHEN FATE DEALT AN UNHAPPY BLOW. THE JAP PATROL HAD WHEELED ON ITS TRACKS AND SUDDENLY APPEARED AT THE BEND IN THE PATH.

JAPS!

TAKE COVER!

ONE MOMENT THE COLUMN WAS AN ORGANISED FIGHTING UNIT, THE NEXT, A BABBLE OF FLYING FIGURES RACING FOR THE COVER OF THE JUNGLE, GUNS BLAZING IN ALL DIRECTIONS.



DESPERATELY, MAITLAND STROVE TO REGAIN CONTROL OF THE STAMPEDING MEN.

NUMBER ONE PLATOON,
TO THE RIGHT FLANK...TWO
PLATOON, TO THE REAR. HOLD
YOUR FIRE AND SORT
YOURSELVES OUT.



TOO LATE, THE SURPRISED JAPS DIVED FOR COVER. NONE SURVIVED THE WITHERING BLAST FROM THE COLUMN'S GUNS AS THEY SWEEPED THE TRACK.



AS THE FIRING DIED AWAY, THE MEN SHEEPISHLY RE-FORMED. FURIOUSLY, MAITLAND ADMONISHED THEM.



SHAKEN AND ANGRY, THE MEN
FELL BACK INTO FORMATION...

IT'S ALL RIGHT FOR THE
CAPTAIN, I RECKON HE WAS
BORN WITH A TOMMY GUN IN
HIS HAND. HE WOULDN'T
TURN A HAIR IF THE WHOLE
BLOOMING JAP ARMY
CAME ROUND THE BEND.

FAIR MADE MY BLOOD
RUN COLD, THEM NIPS
TURNING UP LIKE THAT.

BARELY HAD THE COLUMN MOVED OFF WHEN SERGEANT-MAJOR
FLETCHER DASHED UP THE LINE OF MOVING MEN TO REPORT TO
CAPTAIN MAITLAND.

SMITH AND JACKSON OF THREE PLATOON
ARE MISSING, SIR! THEY MUST HAVE RUN
TOO FAR IN THE SCRIMMAGE, AND LOST
THE COLUMN.

I'LL TAKE A COUPLE
OF MEN AND GO BACK
FOR THEM, SIR!

FOR A LONG MINUTE CAPTAIN MAITLAND PAUSED. WHEN HE SPOKE, HIS FACE WAS DARK AND DRAWN WITH THE AGONY OF THE DECISION THAT WAS FORCED ON HIM. IN AN ICE-COLD VOICE HE ANSWERED HIS YOUNG LIEUTENANT...

NO. ROGERS, WE'LL PUSH ON. IT'S TWO LIVES AGAINST THE WHOLE COMPANY. WITH THE SHINDY WE'VE JUST KICKED UP, THIS WHOLE PLACE WILL BE SWARMING WITH JAPS IN NEXT TO NO TIME.



WHITE FACED, HIS EYES WIDE IN DISBELIEF, LIEUTENANT ROGERS FACED HIS COMMANDER...

BUT, SIR, YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE TWO OF YOUR OWN MEN...THEY HAVEN'T A CHANCE IN THIS JUNGLE.



FEELINGS RAN HIGH AMONG THE MEN AS THEY MARCHED ON, LEAVING THEIR MISSING COMRADES BEHIND THEM.

MURDER, LEAVING 'EM LIKE THAT. THAT DARNED CAPTAIN AIN'T HUMAN!

SHUT YOUR TRAP! ANY MORE OF THAT TALK AND YOU'LL BE UNDER CLOSE ARREST.



FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, CAME VINDICATION OF MAITLAND'S DECISION. THE TRACK THEY HAD SO RECENTLY VACATED BECAME AN INFERNO OF EXPLODING JAP MORTAR BOMBS. TWO LONE SOLDIERS WOULD NEVER AGAIN REJOIN THEIR COMPANY.



TO THROW THE JAPANESE OFF THEIR SCENT, THEY WERE FORCED TO TAKE TO THE ALMOST IMPENETRABLE JUNGLE. HALF BLINDED WITH SWEAT, THEY HACKED AND FOUGHT THEIR WAY THROUGH THE DENSE FOLIAGE.

COME ON! PUT YOUR BACKS INTO IT. THOSE NIPS ARE RIGHT ON OUR HEELS.

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE CAN KEEP THIS PACE UP, SIR!

THE JAPS KNOW WE'RE AROUND, BUT THEY WON'T FIND US IN THIS LOT. WE'LL GO EAST AND THEN DOUBLE BACK TOWARDS KATANGI. IT'LL THROW THEM OFF THE SCENT...



A FEW HOURS LATER, THEY BURST INTO A CLEARING. WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN A PEACEFUL NATIVE VILLAGE, NOW BORE SILENT WITNESS TO THE BESTIALITY OF THE JAPANESE CONQUERORS. IN THE UNNERVING SILENCE THE SOLDIERS PROBED AMONGST THE HUTS, BUT ONLY THE DEAD INHABITED THAT GHOSTLY GLADE...

IT'S 'ORRIBLE, BILL! THIS AIN'T WAR, IT'S MURDER!

STEADY, SON! WE'D BEST GET OUT OF HERE. THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO FOR THE POOR DEVILS.



THE SIGHT OF THE JAPANESE HANDIWORK HAD FILLED EVERY MAN WITH A DEEP HATRED FOR THE YELLOW MEN THEY HAD BEEN SENT TO FIGHT.

YOU SHALL BE AVENGED, MY BROTHERS. THE SAMURAI WILL PAY DEARLY FOR THIS.



FOR FOUR DAYS THEY STRUGGLED THROUGH THE JUNGLE. BUT LATE IN THE AFTERNOON OF THE FOURTH DAY, THE JUNGLE BEGAN TO THIN, HERALDING THE END OF THEIR NIGHTMARE JOURNEY.

COLUMN, HALT!

WE'VE MADE IT! ANOTHER DAY OF THIS AND WE'D HAVE HAD OUR CHIPS!



SILENTLY, THE WEARY MEN SANK TO REST. BUT MAITLAND WOULD ALLOW NO REST FOR HIS OFFICERS AND N.C.O.'S...

WE'LL CAMP HERE FOR THE NIGHT. KATANGI RIDGE IS FOUR MILES TO THE NORTH. THERE WILL BE NO FIRES LIT. SERGEANT-MAJOR, YOU'LL SEE THAT ALL THE AMMUNITION IS DISHED OUT. ROGERS, FOLLOW ME! WE'LL GO FORWARD TO RECCE BEFORE LAST LIGHT...




LEAVING THE COMPANY TO ITS DESPERATELY NEEDED REST, MAITLAND AND ROGERS MOVED FORWARD TO RECONNOITRE THEIR OBJECTIVE. THE AGONISING MARCH HAD CHANGED THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT. NOW HE WAS A LEAN, HARD YOUNG OFFICER STRIDING PURPOSEFULLY BESIDE HIS COMMANDER. EVEN THE UNCOMPROMISING MAITLAND RECOGNISED THE CHANGE IN HIS MEN.

WE'RE RIGHT IN AMONGST THE NIPS NOW, KEN. FOR A BUNCH OF KOOKIES, YOU AND THE MEN HAVEN'T DONE SO BAD. NOT BAD AT ALL!

COMING FROM YOU, SIR, THAT'S QUITE A COMPLIMENT.




ABRUPTLY THE GROUND DROPPED AWAY BEFORE THEM. ACROSS THE WIDE GREEN VALLEY LAY THEIR OBJECTIVE, KATANGI RIDGE. CAUTIOUSLY, MAITLAND PARTED THE FOLIAGE. A SATISFIED SMILE PASSED ACROSS HIS GAUNT FACE AS HE PEERED THROUGH HIS FIELD GLASSES.



THERE IT IS, KEN, AT LAST! THIS IS WHERE THE HIKE WE'VE JUST DONE PAYS OFF. THEY'LL NEVER EXPECT US TO COME IN FROM THIS QUARTER. WE'LL GO IN JUST BEFORE FIRST LIGHT TOMORROW. THEY'LL NEVER KNOW WHAT HIT 'EM...

WE'LL SEE IF THE NIPS LIKE A TASTE OF THEIR OWN MEDICINE. I'VE GOT A HUNCH THEY'RE NOT GOING TO ENJOY THEIR BREAKFAST TOMORROW, SIR.

UNAWARE OF THE CURIOUS EYES THAT WATCHED FROM THE JUNGLE, CAPTAIN OSAKA COMPLETED HIS ROUTINE INSPECTION OF THE NIGHT GUARD ON KATANGI RIDGE.



ALL IS QUIET, SIR.

THERE ARE REPORTS OF SOME INSOLENT BRITISH DOGS BEING AMBUSHED SOME MILES SOUTH OF HERE. NO DOUBT OUR UNITS HAVE ALREADY DEALT WITH THEM, BUT THERE MAY BE STRAGGLERS ABOUT. BE ON YOUR GUARD.

Chapter 3. **BATTLE of the RIDGE**

MEANWHILE, THE MEN OF 'D' COMPANY EASED THEIR ACHING LIMBS AND SETTLED DOWN FOR THE NIGHT. IN THE DAYS OF TORMENT AND STRUGGLE THAT NOW LAY BEHIND THEM, THEY HAD GAINED A COMRADESHIP THAT CAN ONLY COME TO MEN WHO HAVE BEEN DRIVEN TO THE LIMITS OF THEIR ENDURANCE.

HE ONLY LOOKS A KID SLEEPING THERE. DON'T SEEM RIGHT A YOUNGSTER LIKE THAT, OUT HERE.



IT AIN'T RIGHT THAT ANY OF US SHOULD BE OUT IN THIS BLINKIN' DUMP, MATE. NEVER MIND, HAVE A FAG. IT'S MY LAST PACKET, SO MAKE THE MOST OF IT.

IN THE SMALL HOURS OF THE MORNING, THE COMPANY DEPLOYED INTO BATTLE ORDER. ONLY THE OCCASIONAL CLINK OF STEEL AND WHISPERED ORDERS BROKE THE STILL AIR.

ALL SET TO GO, SIR!

OKAY, KEN. LET'S MOVE!

CHECK YOUR SIGHTS, LADS. AND KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN AS WE GO IN...



LIKE GAUNT WALKING SCARECROWS, THE COMPANY MOVED QUIETLY FROM THE JUNGLE INTO THE VALLEY OF DEATH. EACH MAN'S NERVES AS TAUT AS BOW STRINGS

I WISH THE BALLOON WOULD GO UP. ALL THIS CREEPING ABOUT GIVES ME THE WILLIES.

IT'LL GO UP SOON ENOUGH, BUT WE'LL MAKE IT, ALL RIGHT.



NO SOUND BETRAYED THEIR ADVANCE TO THE ENEMY AS THEY STARTED THE ASCENT OF THE HILL. IN THE DIM LIGHT OF MORNING, NO ONE SAW THE SLENDER STEEL THREAD THAT BARRED THE WAY.



WITH A DEAFENING ROAR, THE BOOBY TRAP EXPLODED. FOR A LONG MOMENT, THE LINE FROZE IN ITS TRACKS, THEN WITH A SHRILL CRY, CAPTAIN MAITLAND SPRANG FORWARD.



ALL THE WEEKS OF HARD, RUTHLESS TRAINING SHOWED IN THE MEN NOW, AS THEY FLUNG THEMSELVES UPWARD TOWARD THE JAP POSITIONS.

OPEN FIRE!
CUT DOWN THE
BRITISH DOGS!

KEEP GOING,
MEN! DON'T
GIVE WAY!

THE AIR WAS FILLED WITH THE CLAMOUR OF BATTLE. FROM ABOVE THE ONRUSHING LINE OF BRITISH, TWO VICIOUS MACHINE-GUNS OPENED UP, TEARING GREAT GAPS IN THEIR RANKS.

NOTHING COULD SURVIVE AGAINST THE HAIL OF FIRE THAT POURED FROM THE FANATICAL JAPANESE DEFENDERS. ABOVE THE HIDEOUS DIN, MAITLAND ROARED AN ORDER TO HIS MEN.

BACK, MEN!
GET BACK TO
COVER!

AAAGH!

THE RAPIDLY THINNING LINE FELL BACK TOWARDS THE COVER OF THE JUNGLE, CARRYING THEIR WOUNDED WITH THEM.

UNDER COVER,
MEN! RE-FORM INTO
SECTIONS!



GASPING AND PANTING, THEY FLUNG THEMSELVES DOWN IN THE PROTECTING JUNGLE. ABOVE THEM, THE INHUMAN CHATTER OF THE GUNS DID NOT CEASE. LIKE ANGRY HORNETS, BULLETS ZIPPED THROUGH THE FOLIAGE ABOVE THEIR HEADS.

IT WAS THOSE DARN
WOODPECKERS THEY'VE
GOT UP THERE THAT
DID FOR US, SIR.



THEY'VE GOT TWO UP
THERE ON THE RIGHT FLANK.
THEY'VE GOT TO BE
SILENCED IF WE'RE TO
TAKE THE RIDGE!

IT WAS NOT ONLY CAPTAIN MAITLAND WHO REALISED THEIR DESPERATE POSITION. WITH FUMBLING HANDS, SERGEANT BULLOCK CLAWED TO UNSTRAP THE LOAD OF GRENADES BORNE SO FAITHFULLY BY ONE OF THE MULES.

THESE GRENADES WILL WARM THOSE YELLOW RATS UP A BIT.

GOOD LUCK, SERGEANT, SAHIB!

ALTHOUGH THEY WERE UNPREPARED FOR THE FLYING FIGURE THAT LEAPED PAST THEM UP THE SLOPE, MAITLAND RE-ACTED INSTANTLY AND YELLED A FIRE ORDER TO HIS MEN.

GIVE ME COVERING FIRE, I'M GOING TO SMOKE THEM OUT!

COME BACK, YOU FOOL! IT'S SUICIDE OUT THERE!

TWO HUNDRED YARDS, RAPID FIRE!

A WALL OF FLAME CRASHED FROM THE JUNGLE AS EVERY GUN IN THE COMPANY BLAZED INTO LIFE. OVER SMOKING BARRELS, THEY WATCHED THE CRAZILY ZIG-ZAGGING FIGURE RUN THE GAUNTLET OF THAT FIRE-SWEPT HILL.



WITH BURSTING LUNGS, BULLOCK RACED STRAIGHT INTO THE TEETH OF THE ENEMY FIRE. AROUND HIM THE EARTH BOILED AS THE HEAVY JAP SLUGS BIT HOME, BUT EACH STEP TOOK HIM CLOSER TO HIS TARGET.



EVEN AS THE MACHINE-GUNS CUT HIM DOWN, HE KNEW HE HAD WON THE DEADLY RACE. AS HE SLOWLY CRUMPLED, HE HURLED HIS LAST GRENADE. THE MACHINE-GUN NEST DISINTEGRATED IN AN INFERNO OF BLAST AND FLAME.



WITH A ROAR OF VENGEANCE, THE TATTERED COMPANY ROSE TO THEIR FEET. THE STENTORIAN VOICE OF CAPTAIN MAITLAND URGED HIS MEN FORWARD.

THEY CAN'T STOP US
THIS TIME, MEN!
CHARGE!



THE CHARGE ENDED IN DEADLY HAND TO HAND BATTLE. MAN AGAINST MAN. BRITISH STEEL AGAINST JAP STEEL.



AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD BEGUN, THE BATTLE CEASED. 'D' COMPANY HAD TAKEN THE RIDGE. DAZED, SHOCKED MEN SANK TO THE GROUND, THEIR LEGS SUDDENLY TOO SHAKY TO ALLOW THEM TO STAND.

I UNDERSTAND, SON.
I'VE LOST COMRADES,
TOO.

AND THESE WERE
THE MEN I THOUGHT
WOULDN'T HAVE THE
GUTS TO FIGHT.

QUIETLY, THEY SET ABOUT CLEARING THE CARNAGE, TENDING THE WOUNDED AND MANNING THE FOXHOLES. THEY HAD CAPTURED THE RIDGE. THEY HAD TO HOLD IT.

WELL, I DON'T MIND
ADMITTING, I WAS SCARED
STIFF IN THAT LITTLE LOT.
I NEVER THOUGHT
WE'D MAKE IT.

ME, TOO, BUT THE
CAPTAIN'S A MARVEL.
COOL AS A CUCUMBER
ALL THE WAY THROUGH
THE ATTACK, HE WAS!

CHEER UP, MATES,
WE'RE STILL ALIVE
AND KICKING. HERE,
HAVE A BISCUIT,
I'VE SAVED A FEW.

OF THE 150 MEN WHO HAD STORMED THE
RIDGE, ONLY 85 HAD SURVIVED.

AS THE SUN ROSE HIGHER IN THE SKY, CRAIG MAITLAND BEGAN TO PUT INTO OPERATION HIS PLANS FOR FOOLING THE JAPS AS TO THE SIZE OF THE FORCE UNDER HIS COMMAND.

I WANT TEN MEN.
VOLUNTEERS FOR
A PATROL.

WE'LL GO, SIR.
WHAT'S THE
SCORE?



LIEUTENANT ROGERS LISTEN INTENTLY AS MAITLAND OUTLINED HIS PLANS.

FOUR MILES NORTH OF HERE ALONG THE MAIN TRACK, THERE'S THE VILLAGE OF MONGIN. I WANT A PATROL DOWN THERE PRONTO. YOU'LL GET FOOD FROM THEM. ALSO, THERE'S BOUND TO BE SOME OF THE BURMESE TRAITORS' ARMY THERE. I WANT YOU TO TALK LOUDLY ABOUT OUR BATTALIONS MOVING INTO THE AREA. IT'LL REACH THE JAP EARS QUICK ENOUGH.



WITHIN HALF AN HOUR, THE PATROL WAS READY TO MOVE OFF. AS ALWAYS, CAME THE ORDER...LOAD UP...PREPARE TO MARCH...FORWARD.

MIND HOW YOU GO!
WE WANT TO SEE YOUR
UGLY MUGS AGAIN
SOME TIME.

NOT TO WORRY,
CHUM...WE'LL BE
BACK.

MEANWHILE, TWENTY MILES TO THE NORTH, AN ANXIOUS JAPANESE SERGEANT REPORTED TO COLONEL SUZUKI, THE LOCAL AREA COMMANDER.

COLONEL, SIR, THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS
OF FIRING COMING FROM NUMBER ONE SECTION
AREA. NOW THEY HAVE FAILED TO ANSWER
OUR RADIO SIGNALS.

SUMMON
MY OFFICERS
AT ONCE.

QUICKLY, COLONEL SUZUKI TOLD HIS OFFICERS THE BAD NEWS.



KATANGI HAS FALLEN INTO BRITISH HANDS. PARADE THE BATTALION AT ONCE. WE WILL TEACH THESE WHITE DOGS A LESSON!

IN ANSWER TO THE URGENT SUMMONS OF THE BUGLES, THE YELLOW SOLDIERS SWARMED ABOARD THEIR LORRIES.



MEANWHILE, LIEUTENANT ROGERS WAS LEADING HIS PATROL INTO MONGIN. THE TREACHEROUS HEADMAN GREETED THEM WITH A SMILE.



WELCOME, WHITE SOLDIERS. ALL JAPANESE GONE...WE PLEASSED TO SEE YOU.

THAT IS GOOD. WE ARE THE ADVANCE GUARD FOR MANY WHITE SOLDIERS WHO ARE COMING FROM THE HILLS. WE WANT TO BUY FOOD FROM YOU.

ROGERS SPOKE IN A LOUD, CLEAR VOICE TO HIS CORPORAL. HE WAS WELL AWARE THAT UNSEEN EARS WERE LISTENING...

THIS VILLAGE WILL MAKE A GOOD SPOT FOR BRIGADE H.Q., WHEN THE BATTALIONS MOVE UP, CORPORAL.

YES, SIR. THEY WILL BE HERE BY FIRST LIGHT TOMORROW.

I FETCH YOU PLENTY FOOD, MASTER.

THE JUNGLE MUFFLED THE NOISE OF THE APPROACHING JAPANESE TRUCKS. THE PATROL WAS BUSILY LOADING THE MULES WITH FOOD WHEN A WARNING CRY RANG OUT.

JAPS! RUN FOR IT, MEN! MAKE FOR THE JUNGLE...IT'S OUR ONLY HOPE...

FRANTICALLY, THEY RACED FOR COVER, BUT TOO LATE. THE VILLAGE WAS SWARMING WITH JAPANESE TROOPS. THERE WAS NO WAY OUT FOR THE BRITISH PATROL...



GET DOWN, LAD! WE'LL FIGHT IT OUT HERE... CORPORAL, TRY TO MAKE IT BACK TO THE COMPANY. TELL THE CAPTAIN WHAT'S HAPPENED. GET GOING, MAN! GOOD LUCK!

ON THE RIDGE, MEN STIFFENED IN THEIR FOXHOLES. FROM FAR OFF, CAME THE SOUND OF SMALL ARMS FIRE. ANXIOUSLY, THEY STARED DOWN AT THE GREEN WALL THAT SURROUNDED THEM.

IT'S THE PATROL, SIR... THEY'VE BUMPED INTO TROUBLE. I'LL TAKE A FEW MEN AND...

STEADY, SERGEANT-MAJOR! I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL, BUT THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO. OUR ORDERS ARE TO HOLD THIS RIDGE. WE NEED EVERY MAN WE'VE GOT NOW.



SIR! THERE'S SOMETHING MOVING THERE! IT'S HYNES... CORPORAL HYNES!

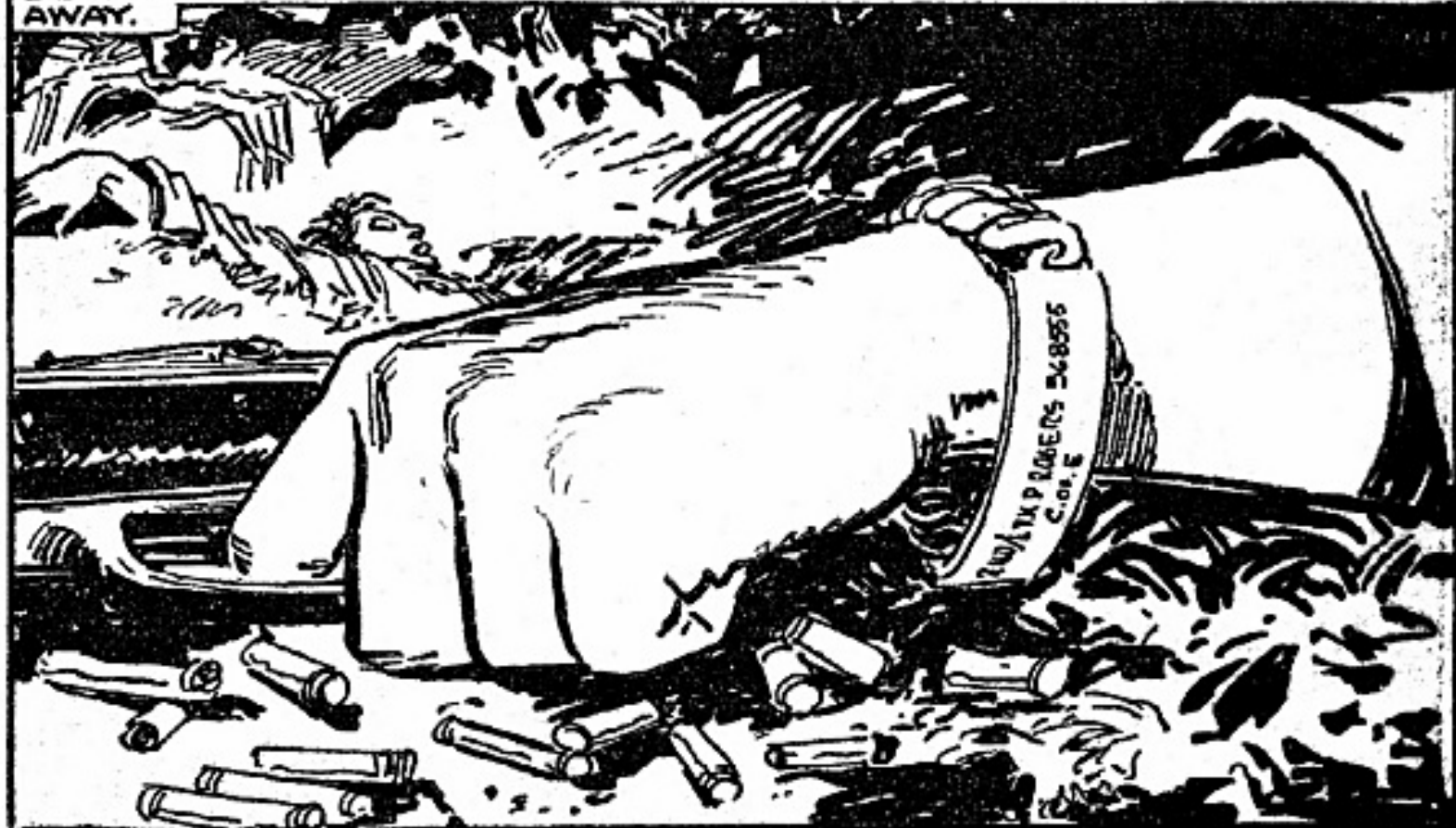
WILLING HANDS HELPED THE EXHAUSTED CORPORAL BACK TO SAFETY. BETWEEN GASPS, HE GABBLED OUT HIS REPORT.

TAKE YOUR
TIME...YOU'RE
SAFE NOW.

THEY CAUGHT US IN THE VILLAGE, SIR...
DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE...JUNGLE'S FULL
OF JAPS...THE LIEUTENANT STAYED
TO FIGHT.



IN A REMOTE CORNER OF THAT FORSAKEN LAND, KEN ROGERS AND HIS GALLANT BAND HAD SOLD THEIR LIVES DEARLY. THEY HAD DIED DEFENDING THEIR HOMELAND THAT WAS SO MANY THOUSAND MILES AWAY.



THEY HAD NOT DIED IN VAIN. FOR ONCE THE WILY JAPANESE HAD BEEN DECEIVED. JUST AS GENERAL BLUTCHER HAD PLANNED.

MANY WHITE SOLDIERS COMING, SIR. I HEAR OFFICER MAN SAY, BRIGADE H.Q. WILL BE IN VILLAGE.

IF YOU LIE, YOU DOG, YOU SHALL DIE.



COLONEL SUZUKI URGENTLY SUMMONED REINFORCEMENTS. THE STAGE HAD BEEN SET...



UNKNOWNLY, THE JAPANESE 3RD. ARMY CORPS WAS MARCHING NORTH INTO THE JAWS OF A TRAP. A TRAP, ONCE CLOSED, FROM WHICH IT WOULD NEVER EXTRICATE ITSELF.

THE TENSE MEN WHO CROUCHED ON THE RIDGE DID NOT HAVE LONG TO WAIT. SUDDENLY, THE STILL AIR WAS SHATTERED. YELLING THEIR WAR CHANT, THE FANATICAL JAPS POURED FROM THE JUNGLE.



200 YARDS...100...50...THE BELCHING MACHINE-GUNS OF 'D' COMPANY CARVED GREAT GAPS IN THE ONCOMING RANKS, BUT STILL THE LITTLE WARRIORS GAINED THE BROW OF THE RIDGE.



NUMBER ONE PLATOON TOOK THE SHOCK OF THE ATTACK WITH FIXED BAYONETS. FELLED BY A JAP RIFLE BUTT, CHICK HENDERSON SLUMPED TO THE GROUND, BUT ACROSS HIS BODY STOOD BILL TAYLOR, DEFENDING HIS YOUNG FRIEND THROUGH THE TERRIBLE SLAUGHTER OF CLOSE QUARTER FIGHTING.



FOR SOME MINUTES THE BATTLE SWAYED IN THE BALANCE. THEN THE JAPANESE BROKE BEFORE THE INVINCIBLE LINE OF STEEL.

THE SHATTERED JAPANESE FORCE MELTED BACK INTO THE JUNGLE, WEARILY, THE MEN OF 'D' COMPANY SANK TO REST AND TO LICK THEIR WOUNDS.

YOU SAVED MY LIFE, BILL - I'LL NOT FORGET THAT IN A HURRY.

FORGET IT, KID... WE'VE GIVEN THOSE NIPS A PASTING. THEY WON'T BE QUITE SO EAGER FOR ANOTHER DOSE.

WE'RE DOWN TO SIXTY-THREE MEN, SIR. NUMBER ONE PLATOON'S PRETTY BADLY MAULLED.

CLOSE UP THE PERIMETER AND REFORM THE MEN INTO TWO PLATOONS, SERGEANT-MAJOR. WE'VE GOT RID OF THE JAPS FOR NOW, BUT THEY'LL BE BACK...



IN THE HOURS THAT FOLLOWED, THE JAPS KEPT UP A SPASMODIC FIRE FROM THE COVER OF THE JUNGLE. ON THE SUN-BAKED RIDGE, MEN WITH PARCHED THROATS AND RED-RIMMED EYES, AIMED AND RETURNED THE FIRE. LACKING THE AID THAT WOULD NEVER COME, ONE BY ONE THE WOUNDED QUIETLY DIED.

THEY'RE WITTLING US DOWN, SIR. HOW LONG CAN WE LAST OUT?

TO THE LAST ROUND! THE NIPS MUSTN'T THINK WE'RE THINNING OUT. WE'LL PROP THE DEAD UP IN POSITION. THE MEN THAT ARE LEFT WILL MOVE FROM PLACE TO PLACE AND FIRE. THEY WON'T TRY TO RUSH US IF THEY THINK WE'RE STILL AT FULL STRENGTH...



FAITHFULLY, THE COMPANY OBEYED THE MACABRE... DEAD MEN REINFORCED THE PITIFULLY THIN LINES OF DEFENDERS.

WELL DONE, LADS! KEEP IT UP! THIS'LL KEEP THE LITTLE SWINES GUESSING!



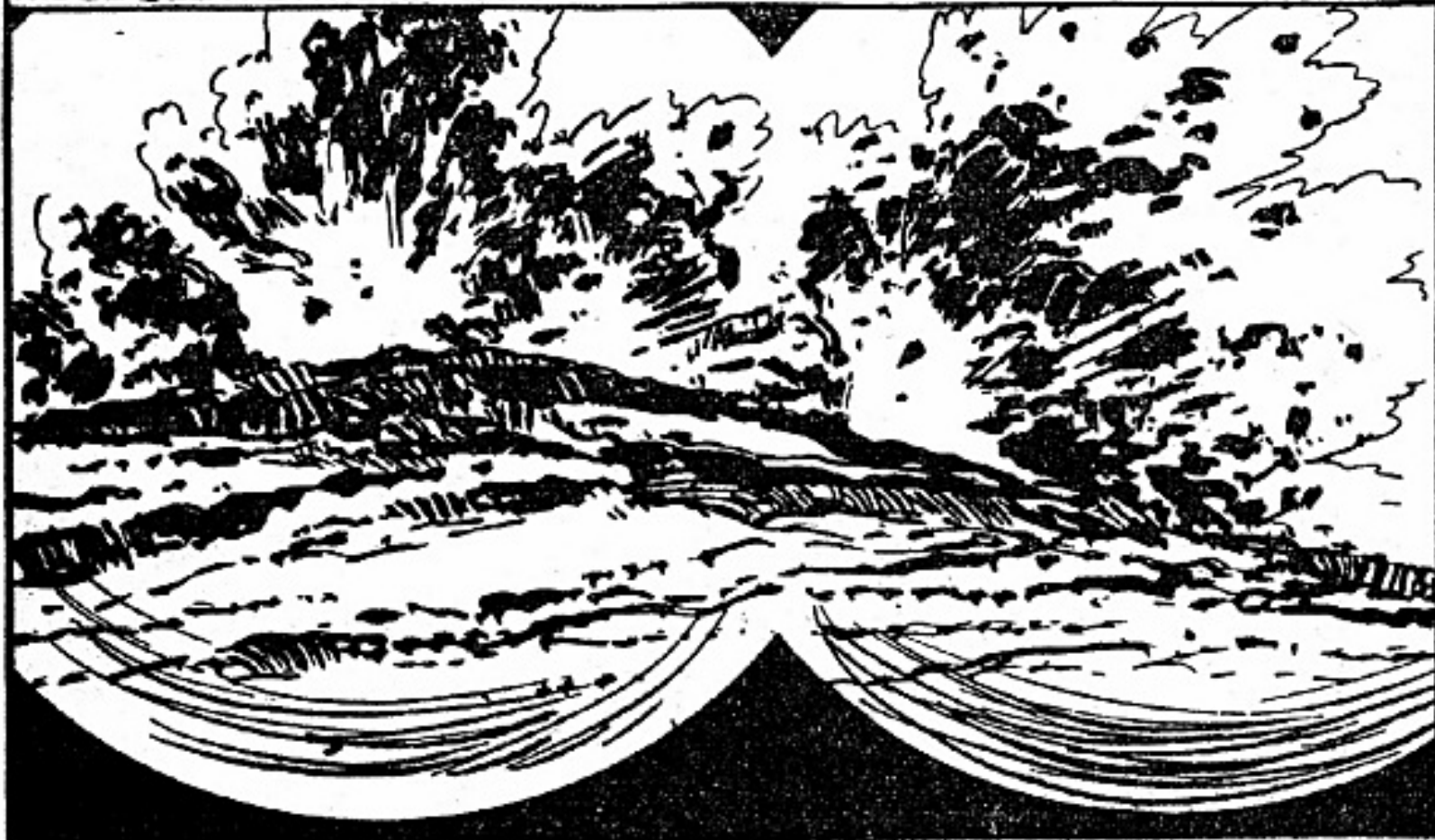
THE DECEPTION WORKED. FURIOUSLY COLONEL SUZUKI ORDERED HIS MEN TO REDOUBLE THEIR EFFORTS.

THEY MUST HAVE A BATTALION ON THE RIDGE, SIR. ALL THEIR POSITIONS ARE FULLY MANNED STILL.

INTENSIFY THE FIRE. WE CANNOT ATTACK AGAIN UNTIL WE GET REINFORCEMENTS. THERE MUST BE NO LET UP. THOSE DOGS SHALL NOT ESCAPE US.



THE AIR SUDDENLY FILLED WITH THE DEADLY WHINE OF JAP MORTARS. THE RIDGE BECAME A HELL HOLE OF ERUPTING FLAME AND FLYING SHRAPNEL.



IT WAS A SPLINTER FROM A BURSTING BOMB THAT CAUGHT SMILER JOHNSON. THROUGH MISTS OF PAIN HE GAZED UP AT HIS COMRADES. HIS LAST FEW WORDS WERE NO MORE THAN A DRY CROAKING WHISPER.

FUNNY... NEVER THOUGHT I'D COP IT THIS WAY... GOOD LUCK, I HOPE YOU MAKE...

WE WILL, SMILER... WE WILL...

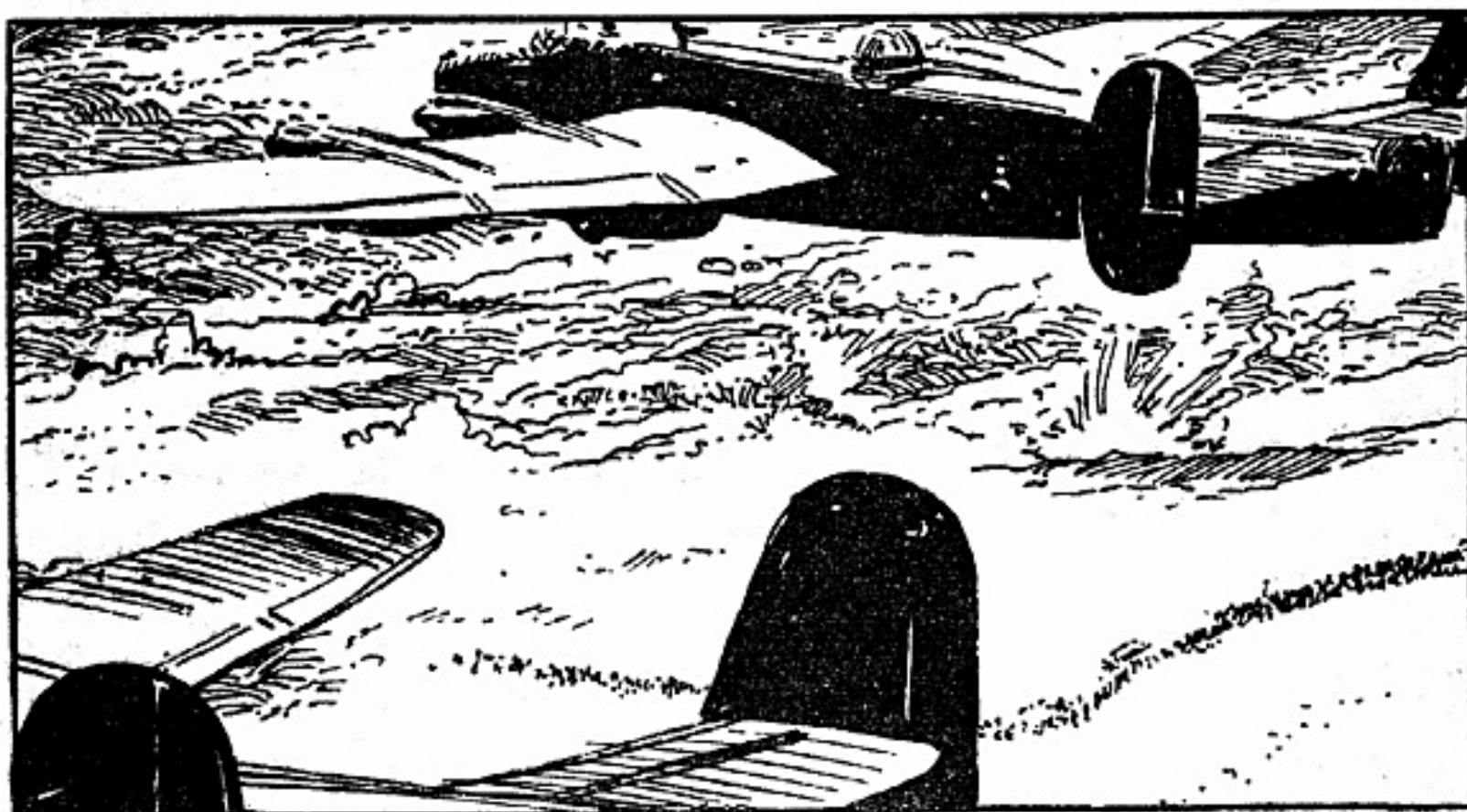


IN SILENCE, THE TWO MEN MOVED BACK TO THEIR POSITIONS. THEIR GUNS ROARED INTO LIFE AND IN THEIR MINDS WAS ONE THOUGHT, VENGEANCE.



Chapter 4. PROUD RETURN

AS THE GALLANT 'D' COMPANY BATTLED FOR SURVIVAL, THE INDIAN DIVISION SWUNG INTO ACTION. FAR AWAY TO THE SOUTH, THE GROUND SHOOK WITH THE THUNDER OF ARTILLERY.



FATALLY, THE JAPANESE CORPS HAD CROSSED THE TALISHAN RIVER. BEHIND THEM THE CONCEALED GUNS DESTROYED THEIR ONE CHANCE OF RETREAT. WITH BOMBERS SCREAMING FROM THE SKY IN SUPPORT, THE INDIAN DIVISION CLOSED IN FOR THE KILL.

WITH NO CHANCE TO MANOEUVRE, OUT-FOUGHT AND OUT-GUNNED, THE CREAM OF THE IMPERIAL ARMY OF NIPPON, TASTED THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT...



TO THE FORGOTTEN COMPANY ON KATANGI RIDGE, NIGHT TIME BROUGHT LITTLE RELIEF TO THEIR SUFFERING. FROM THE JUNGLE THEY COULD HEAR THE INSANE CHATTER OF THEIR YELLOW FOES.

SURRENDER, JOHNNY.
YOU HAVE BEEN BETRAYED
BY YOUR OFFICERS. YOUR
ARMIES HAVE BEEN DEFEATED.
LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS AND
GIVE UP. IF YOU DON'T,
YOU WILL DIE...

SHUT YOUR UGLY
LITTLE TRAP, NIP!
YOU'LL HAVE TO
COME AND GET US.



SLOWLY, THE LONG HOURS DRAGGED PAST. OCCASIONALLY, THE NIGHT AIR WAS TORN BY BURSTS OF FIRE, THAT CEASED AS ABRUPTLY AS THEY BEGAN. IN ONE OF THE LULLS BETWEEN FIRING, A HOARSE WHISPER CAME FROM A FORWARD POSITION.



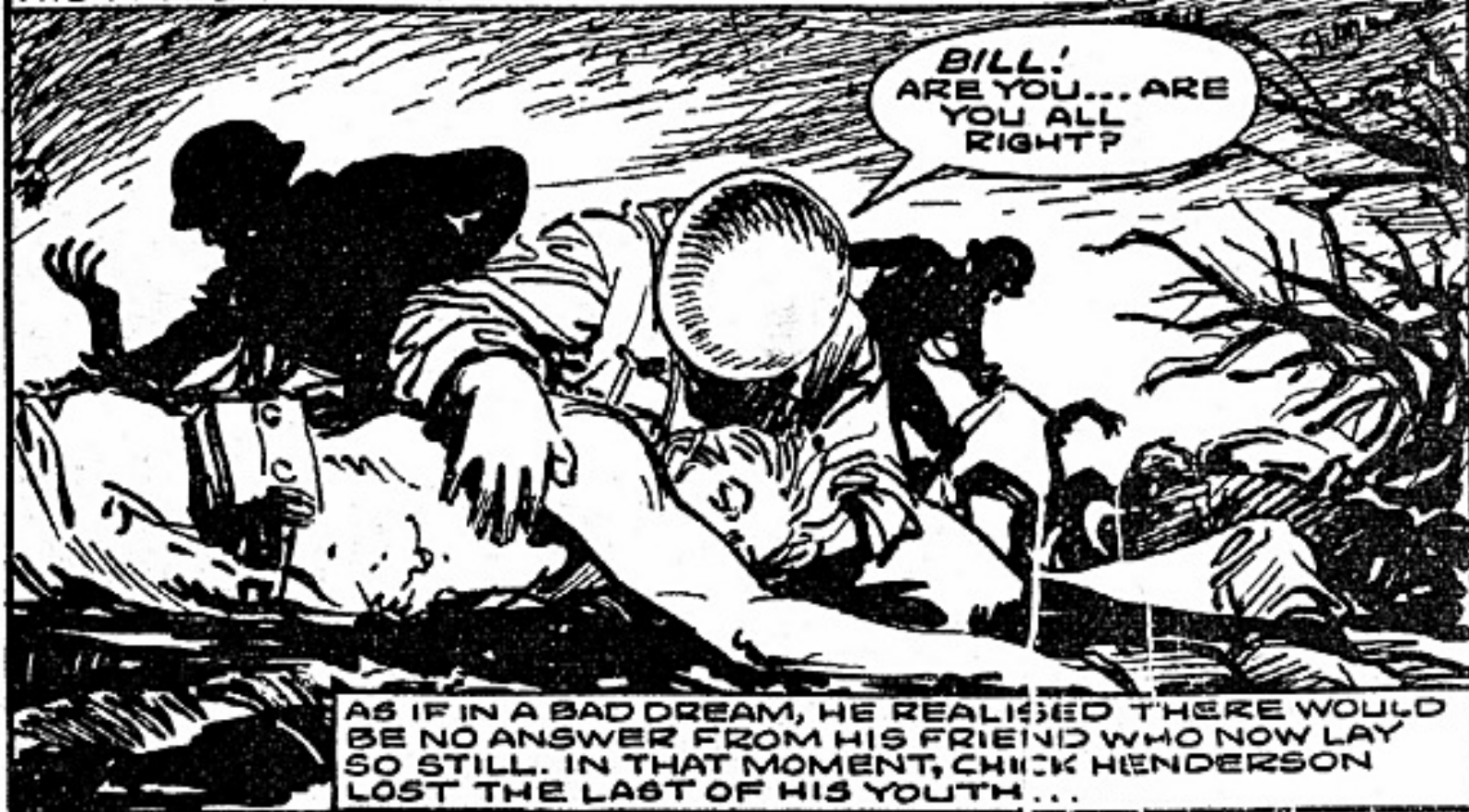
EVEN AS HE GAVE THE ORDER, THERE CAME A RATTLE AND CLICK AS MEN WORKED THE BOLTS OF THEIR RIFLES, TENSING THEMSELVES FOR THE THREAT THAT WAS CREEPING OUT OF THE DARKNESS.



CAUGHT IN THE GHASTLY WHITE GLARE OF THE BURSTING VEREY LIGHT, THE JAP PATROL STOOD OUT CLEARLY LESS THAN A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE BRITISH POSITIONS. WITH AN ANGRY ROAR THE MEN OF 'D' COMPANY LUNGED FORWARD...



THE FIGHT WAS SHORT AND MURDEROUS, BUT FOR BILL TAYLOR IT WAS THE LAST CHARGE. WITH A HORRIFIED GASP, CHICK HENDERSON KNELT BESIDE HIS FALLEN COMRADE...



AS IF IN A BAD DREAM, HE REALISED THERE WOULD BE NO ANSWER FROM HIS FRIEND WHO NOW LAY SO STILL. IN THAT MOMENT, CHICK HENDERSON LOST THE LAST OF HIS YOUTH...

ONCE AGAIN THEY SETTLED DOWN TO AWAIT THE DAWN. A DAWN WHICH EACH MAN KNEW MUST BE THE LAST THEY WOULD SEE ON KATANGI RIDGE. THERE WAS A COLD REALITY IN SERGEANT-MAJOR FLETCHER'S WORDS AS HE SPOKE TO CAPTAIN MAITLAND.

ABOUT FOUR HOURS TO FIRST LIGHT, SIR. THE WAY THE MEN ARE NOW IT'LL BE ALL OVER SOON. THE MEN HAVE DONE WELL ENOUGH, BUT IT ONLY NEEDS ONE MORE ATTACK!

THEY'VE DONE MORE THAN WELL, THEY'RE ALL HEROES NOW. I THINK I'LL MOVE AROUND AND HAVE A FEW WORDS WITH EACH OF THEM. WE CAN'T EXPECT TO HOLD OUT MUCH AFTER SUNRISE.



AS HE MOVED OFF ON HIS GLOOMY TASK, THE ONE LINK THAT CONNECTED THE BRITISH WITH THEIR OWN FORCES CRACKLED INTO LIFE. A WIRELESS OPERATOR ALMOST DRUGGED WITH LACK OF SLEEP, SUDDENLY BECAME ALERT...



STRAINING HIS EARS, MAITLAND COULD JUST MAKE OUT THE SIGNAL THAT CAME CRACKLING FAINTLY FROM THE ATMOSPHERE.

TO FORCE KNIGHTSBRIDGE...
OPERATION SUCCESSFUL.
EVACUATE POSITION... MAKE
YOUR WAY BACK. REPEAT...
EVACUATE THE POSITION.
GOOD LUCK! OUT!



TENSELY, THE MEN GATHERED ROUND HIM. A SPARK OF HOPE FLARED AGAIN IN THE COMPANY. CRISP, MAITLAND ISSUED HIS ORDERS.

WE'RE PULLING OUT. THEY'LL SPOT US IF WE ALL GO TOGETHER, BUT IN TWO'S AND THREE'S WE STAND A CHANCE. WE'LL RENDEZVOUS AT THE OLD CAMP SITE. SERGEANT-MAJOR... ORGANISE SOME STRETCHERS! THE WOUNDED COME WITH US...



AS HIS MEN SLIPPED AWAY IN SMALL GROUPS, MAITLAND AND FLETCHER MOVED METHODICALLY THROUGH THE POSITIONS DESTROYING THE EQUIPMENT THAT HAD TO BE ABANDONED.



WHAT'S THE GAME, SIR.

MAKING SURE THE JAPS GET A WARM WELCOME WHEN THEY ARRIVE. LOOSE OFF A FEW ROUNDS, SERGEANT-MAJOR! DON'T WANT THEM TO THINK WE'RE ON THE MOVE! THEN YOU'D BETTER GET GOING...

SOON MAITLAND STOOD ALONE. AROUND HIM, A GRIM GARRISON OF DEAD MEN STILL REMAINED FAITHFULLY AT THEIR POSTS. FOR A MOMENT HE PAUSED TO TAKE ONE LAST LOOK AT THAT NIGHTMARE RIDGE, BEFORE HE TOO SLIPPED QUIETLY INTO THE INKY DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT...

I COULD NOT HAVE ASKED FOR BETTER MEN THAN THESE. THEY FOUGHT MAGNIFICENTLY AND NOW IT'S JUST A DEAD MAN'S HILL!



UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS, THEY CREPT THROUGH THE JAP LINES UNDETECTED. WITH WHISPERED GREETINGS, THEY COLLECTED IN THE CLEARING. SERGEANT-MAJOR FLETCHER REPORTED TO CAPTAIN MAITLAND.


FORTY-FIVE MEN ALL PRESENT AND CORRECT, SIR.

GOOD! THE FARTHER WE ARE FROM HERE BEFORE DAWN, THE HEALTHIER IT WILL BE! GET THEM FORMED UP AND WE'LL PULL OUT...



BEARING THEIR WOUNDED WITH THEM, THE REMNANTS OF 'D' COMPANY MOVED OUT. WITH AN AGONISING EFFORT, THEY FORCED THEIR WEARY BODIES TO MARCH. ONLY THE THOUGHT OF THE SAFETY THAT LAY SOMEWHERE AHEAD KEPT THEM ON THEIR FEET.


I CAN'T LET THEM DOWN NOW. GOT TO GET THEM BACK SOMEHOW. MUST KEEP GOING... BUT WE'VE GOT TO HAVE FOOD...



MILE AFTER MILE THEY RETRACED THEIR STEPS. AS THE DARKNESS GAVE WAY TO THE GREEN TWILIGHT OF THE JUNGLE DAY, MAITLAND SUDDENLY FROZE AND SIGNALLLED FOR THE MEN TO HALT. AHEAD IN THE JUNGLE SOMETHING MOVED...

IT'S JUST TOO BAD IF IT'S THE NIPS. WE DON'T STAND A CHANCE NOW.

HOLD UP, SQUADDY, WE'RE NOT DEAD YET!



FROM THE UNDERGROWTH CRASHED A LARGE WATER BUFFALO. TO THE STARVING MEN IT MEANT SALVATION. WITH FAST-FAILING STRENGTH MAITLAND LEVELLED A RIFLE.

BULLSEYE, SIR...
ROAST BEEF FOR
LUNCH!

A large water buffalo is shown crashing through dense jungle foliage. The animal is depicted in a dynamic, almost falling posture, with its body angled towards the right. The surrounding vegetation is thick and detailed, with many leaves and branches visible. In the background, several soldiers are visible, some looking towards the buffalo. The scene is set in a jungle environment with tall trees and dense undergrowth.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DAYS, THE SURVIVORS OF 'D' COMPANY ATE THEIR FILL. AND AS THEY RESTED, THE SOUND OF A FAR OFF EXPLOSION CAME TO THEM. KATANGI RIDGE HAD HURLED ITS LAST DEFIANCE AT THE ENEMY.

DID YOU HEAR
THAT, SERGEANT-
MAJOR?

A group of soldiers are shown resting in a jungle clearing. In the foreground, a sergeant-major and a soldier are engaged in conversation. The sergeant-major is wearing a pith helmet and a light-colored uniform, while the soldier is wearing a similar uniform. They are both looking towards the right. In the background, other soldiers are visible, some sitting on the ground and others standing. The scene is set in a jungle environment with tall trees and dense undergrowth.

SOUNDS LIKE THAT
BOOBY TRAP YOU SET
BEFORE WE PULLED OUT
DID KEEP THE JAPS
BUSY, SIR.

INCENSED WITH FURY AT THE MOTIONLESS MEN WHO DID NOT REPLY TO HIS FIRING, COLONEL SUZUKI HIMSELF HAD LED THE CHARGE AGAINST THE RIDGE.

THEY DO NOT MOVE,
THOSE WHITE DOGS ON
THE RIDGE!

THEY MAKE NO ANSWER.
THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG
UP THERE. FOLLOW ME, MEN...
FORWARD!



BURSTING ON TO THE RIDGE, THE JAPS WERE CONFRONTED ONLY BY THE DEAD. FURIOUSLY, COLONEL SUZUKI WRENCHED A DEAD SOLDIER FROM HIS POST. HE DID NOT SEE THE HALF CONCEALED WIRE THAT LED FROM THE SOLDIER'S BELT TO A PILE OF T.N.T.

THEY ARE ALL DEAD,
SIR! ALL DEAD!

WE'VE BEEN TRICKED!
THE DOGS HAVE TRICKED
US!



WITH A DEAFENING ROAR, THE RIDGE HAD ERUPTED IN A SHEET OF FLAME. WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARED, THE JAPANESE, TOGETHER WITH ALL THE GRIM DEBRIS OF BATTLE, HAD BEEN WIPED AWAY. SOON THE JUNGLE WOULD GROW AGAIN AND HIDE THE SCAR THAT HAD ONCE BEEN THE BLOOD-STAINED KATANGI RIDGE!



FOR THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS, 'D' COMPANY STAGGERED WESTWARD... THROUGH JUNGLE, SWAMP AND ELEPHANT GRASS THEY LURCHED AND SOMETIMES CRAWLED. MAITLAND HARDLY RECOGNISED THE HAGGARD FACE AS THAT OF YOUNG CHICK HENDERSON, AS HE HELPED HIM TO HIS FEET.

I CAN'T GO ON,
SIR... I CAN'T...

YOU'VE GOT TO, MAN, YOU'VE
GOT TO! WE CAN'T BE FAR FROM
OUR OWN LINES NOW... JUST A FEW
MORE MILES... COME ON, YOU
CAN MAKE IT!



SIR! THERE'S
MOVEMENT AHEAD!
MAYBE IT'S JAPS...

TOO EXHAUSTED TO MOVE, THEY WAITED FOR THE END. SECONDS LATER A BRITISH PATROL BURST OUT ON TO THE TRACK. DULLY, MAITLAND KNEW THEIR ORDEAL WAS AT AN END.

FOR PETE'S SAKE!
WHERE DID YOU LOT
COME FROM?

IT'S TOO LONG A
STORY NOW, LIEUTENANT.
MY MEN NEED HELP.

THE SIGHT OF FRESH BRITISH UNIFORMS AND THE RATIONS THAT WERE EAGERLY DEVoured PUT NEW LIFE INTO THE TATTERED MEN...

THE MAIN CAMP IS ONLY
FOUR MILES AWAY, SIR. YOU
STAY HERE AND REST. I'LL
LEAVE SOME OF MY MEN
WITH YOU AND GO BACK
FOR HELP.

THANK
YOU, BUT...

IF IT'S ALL THE SAME TO
YOU, SIR, THE MEN WOULD
LIKE TO GO BACK THE SAME
WAY AS THEY CAME OUT...
MARCHING! THEY FIGURE
THEY DON'T NEED ANY
HELP FOR THE LAST LAP...

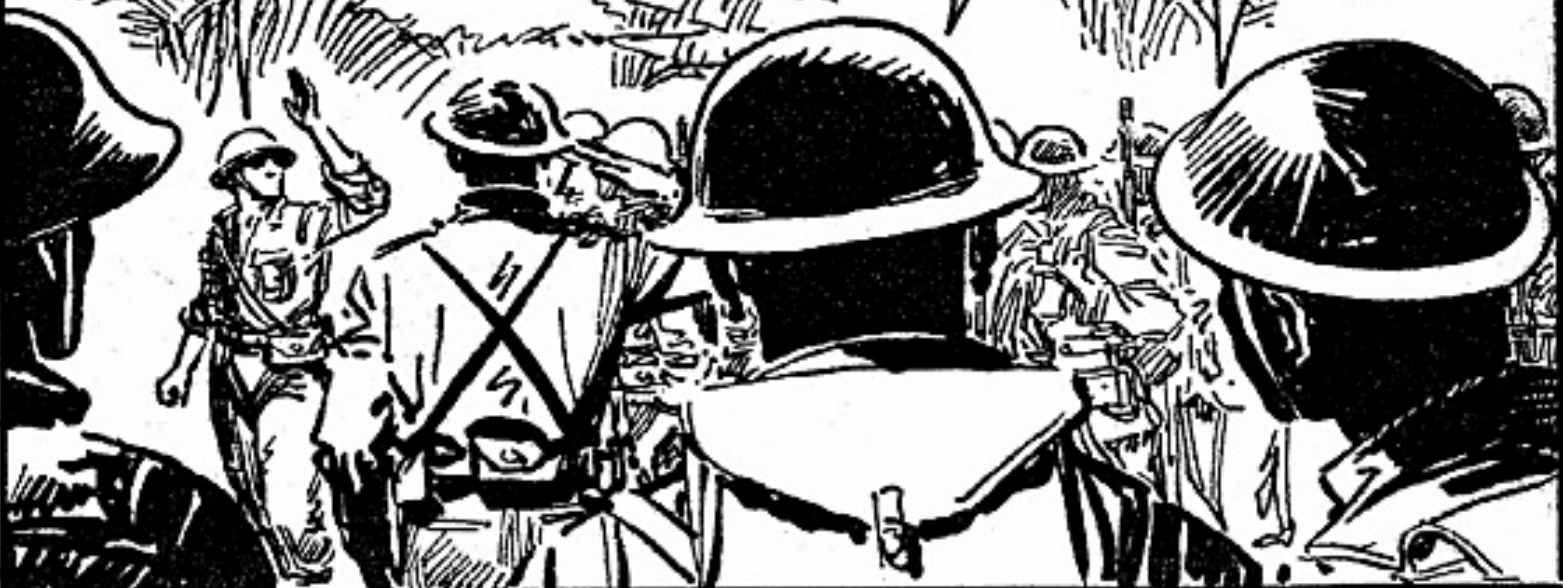


TO THE ASTONISHMENT OF THE PATROL, THE EXHAUSTED BAND STRAIGHTENED UP, WITH A GRIM SMILE OF SATISFACTION, MAITLAND MARCHED TO THE HEAD OF THE RAGGED COLUMN...

FORWARD MARCH!

LOOK AT THOSE GUYS! I RECKON THEY'VE GOT GUTS!

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN!



A STARTLED GENERAL BLUTCHER STARED ACROSS THE CLEARING IN THE CAMP. SLOWLY, WITH HEADS ERECT, A COLUMN OF MEN HARDLY RECOGNISABLE AS HUMAN BEINGS MARCHED INTO SIGHT.

GOOD GRIEF! IT CAN'T BE MAITLAND'S COMPANY! THE REPORT SAID THEY WERE WIPE OUT!

IT IS, SIR. A PATROL PICKED THEM UP TWO HOURS AGO...






SUDDENLY, THE GENERAL LOOKED OLD, AS HE WALKED FORWARD TO MEET THE COMPANY HE HAD SENT TO DESTRUCTION. A YOUNG COMPANY HAD SET OUT, A HANDFUL OF VETERANS HAD RETURNED...

THERE'S NOT MUCH OF US LEFT, BUT WE HELD THE RIDGE, SIR.

CAPTAIN, THERE IS SOMETHING I MUST TELL YOU. WE DID NOT NEED TO TAKE THAT RIDGE, BUT IT DREW THE JAPS OFF FROM THE SOUTH. OUR BIG PUSH WENT IN THERE!

THE GENERAL KNEW IT WAS A BITTER CONFESSION, BUT HE OWED IT TO THOSE MEN OF COURAGE.

I COULDN'T TELL THEM, OR YOU. I KNEW THAT TO ORDER FRESH TROOPS TO THROW AWAY THEIR LIVES FOR AN OBJECTIVE THAT WE DIDN'T WANT, WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO MUCH. THEY COULDN'T HAVE GONE THROUGH WITH IT... AND NO ONE COULD HAVE BLAMED THEM...



THERE WAS A LONG PAUSE... SLOWLY, CRAIG MAITLAND STUDIED THE FACES OF HIS MEN. HE REMEMBERED AGAIN ALL THOSE WHO HAD NOT RETURNED.. A FIERCE PRIDE SHONE IN HIS EYES AS HE ANSWERED THE GENERAL.

YOU COULD HAVE TOLD THEM, SIR. THEY WOULD HAVE HELD THAT HILL FOR YOU ANYWAY. YOU COULD HAVE TOLD THEM.



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No. 124.—LUCKY STRIKE



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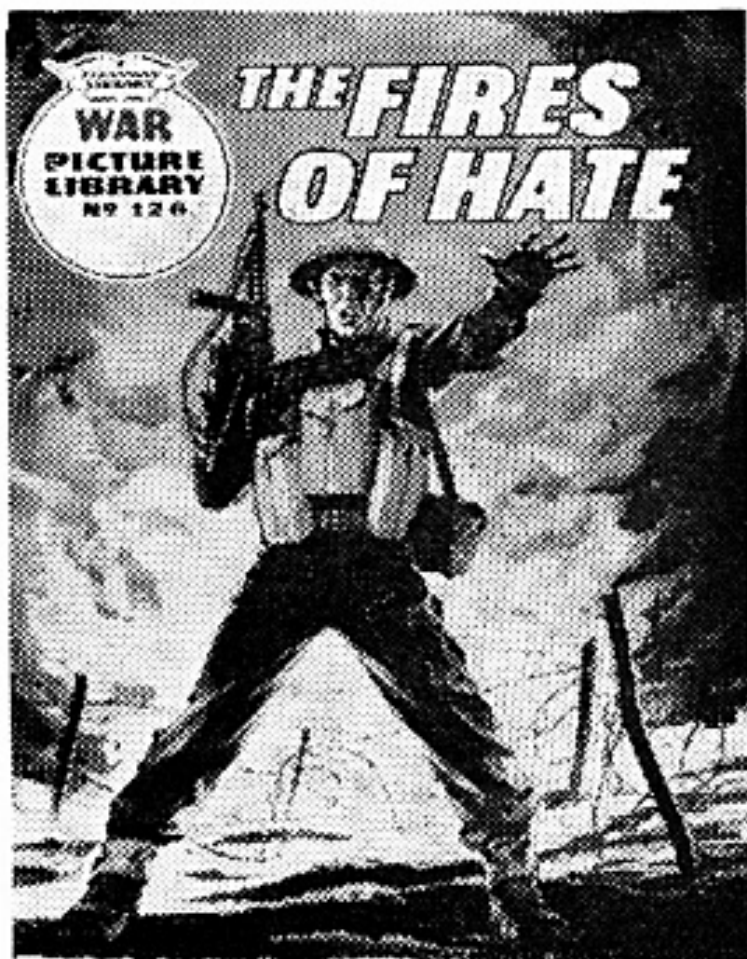
No. 127.—DIVIDED WE FALL

Next month's **FOUR** thrilling **WAR PICTURE LIBRARY** issues, on sale January 1st, are :—

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